DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 939 FL 019 360

AUTHOR Long, Donna Reseigh; Harlow, Linda L.
TITLE The Newspaper and the Five Skills.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 11p.; In: New Challenges and Opportunities. Dimension: Languages 87. Report of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching, p99-108, 1988. For the proceedings, see FL 019 352.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Awareness; Instructional Materials; *Language Skills; Listening Skills; *Media Selection; *Newspapers; Reading Skills; *Second Language Instruction; Skill Development; Speech Skills; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Authentic Materials

ABSTRACT

Authentic materials can be used to promote second language acquisition. Research on their effects on each language skill (reading, culture, writing, speaking, listening) is needed. Print media (such as newspapers) which are available and motivation, offer real interaction with the target language and culture, and are a valuable instructional resource. They are superior to the simplified language in edited texts, and contribute to the learning of coping skills. Newspapers also offer "snapshots" of segments of the target culture, making them a logical medium for cross-cultural analysis. High-interest authentic reading materials support improvement of second language writing skills. Quality of writing is linked to quantity of reading done for interest or pleasure. Linking reading comprehension to speaking is also feasible; second language instruction mirrors real life when students are encouraged to react orally to authentic readings. Reading authentic texts may generate two types of communicative activities: summarizing text contents, and discussing the content with another reader. To link listening to text, students should read the text and focus on authentic response formats incorporating listening skills. Choice of materials, visual appearance, and construction of activities must be carefully planned for successful use. Regional as well as major sources should be used. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Long, Donna Reseigh
Harlow, Linda L.
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED336939

8

The Newspaper and the Five Skills

Donna Reseigh Long and Linda L. Harlow
The Ohio State University

Introduction

Materials like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television broadcasts are often suggested as motivational sources of authentic input for enriching or replacing textbook activities. The present article seeks to synthesize the literature on authentic materials and relate it to the five skill areas: reading, culture, speaking, writing, and listening. In addition, it provides practical suggestions for applying the research findings to the development of classroom activities. While it is understood that print media are by their nature reading texts, the authors wish to capitalize on both the availability and motivational quality of such resources and extend their use in authentic ways to other skill areas.

Authenticity

The question of authenticity of input used in language instruction has recently become prominent within the profession. In a lay sense, the term "authentic" is generally understood to mean "genuine or real," and it is precisely the interpretation of that term that has given impetus to the current polemic. In practical terms, it means choosing whether to use materials created by and for native speakers versus those created for pedagogical purposes.

Essentially three distinct definitions of authenticity can be found in the literature. Widdowson (1978) has posited the idea that authenticity resides within the receiver, not the sender. It is a quality that only the reader may determine by virtue of having interacted with, and comprehended, the target language. In Widdowson's terms authenticity has to do with the receiver's response to linguistic input. Swaffer (1985), on the other hand, puts the

FL019360

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

onus of authenticity on the message itself. She contends that if the principal intent of a text is to communicate meaning, then the text is by nature authentic, whether intended for native speakers or for second language learners. Because the majority of materials for the latter group are developed with the objective of teaching specific grammar structures, vocabulary, and cultural information rather than with communicating information, they do not meet Swaffer's criterion of authenticity. Representative of the third point of view, Rings (1986) points out that the language situation itself is important in establishing authenticity. Not only the speaker, but also the instructional situation must be authentic in order for language structures and content to be authentic. Stated simply, authentic texts must be set within an authentic context.

While the topic of authenticity has been hotly debated, very little empirical evidence about the effects of authentic materials on student achievement has been reported. As one would expect, most of the relevant research has focused on acquisition of reading skills. While some researchers have found that simplified materials produce superior comprehension (Klare, 1978; Davies, 1984), others have discussed positive results using authentic reading or listening materials (Levine and Haus, 1985; Duquette, Dunnett and Papalia, 1987). Clearly, there is a need for further investigation. In the meantime, however, authentic materials seem to be a logical basis for instructional activities, and informal classroom observation indicates that learners enjoy using them.

Print Media

The purpose of the present article is to focus on texts found in newspapers and magazines published by and for native speakers of French and Spanish. These two forms of popular media were selected over literature or other varieties of authentic materials for several reasons. Because newspapers and magazines have a contemporary focus on many areas of common interest such as sports, social life, entertainment, politics, and economics, they have a great deal of natural appeal for adolescent and adult second language learners. In addition, such publications are readily available on the newsstands in many areas of the United States. With even a single copy of a newspaper or magazine, one can create a multitude of interesting, authentic language activities.

Use of Authentic Materials to Teach Second Language Skills: Focus on Reading

Teaching students to read in a second language comprises the most logical application of print media. Yet author-generated texts are still the norm in foreign language textbooks, at least at the first year level (Beatie, Martin, and Oberst, 1984). Beattie *et al* recommend that future textbooks contain a selection of materials of a more challenging stylistic range and content that force the learner to read for comprehension, all of which can be amply found in authentic language samples.

Although a common criticism of the use of authentic materials is a perceived inability of the learner to process the complexities of authentic language, the difficulty level of a reading exercise may actually be more dependent upon the comprehension activities than the text itself. Rather than teaching reading with graded texts, Grellet (1981) advocates using graded exercises and authentic texts.

Bernhardt (1984) argues for the use of natural materials from an information-processing perspective in foreign language reading. Along with other researchers (see, for example, Levine and Hause, 1985; Johnson, 1981), she maintains that activitating learner's schemata, or background knowledge, is more effective in aiding comprehension than the use of linguistically simplified materials. Edited texts that result from the simplifying process often impede comprehension, since many cohesive features, such as redundancies and discourse indicators tend to be eliminated in the process. In addition, real discourse presents structures and vocabulary in natural surroundings and in a natural sequence, that of frequency of occurrence (Tetrault, 1984).

Finally, the acquisition of a second language as defined by Krashen and Terrell (1983) is based upon comprehensible input. Both written and oral authentic materials are a major source of this input. Authentic texts at the i + 1 level (slightly beyond the students' level of competence) are used primarily for acquisition purposes, and texts at higher levels are used for the development of coping skills.

Focus on Culture

By carefully selecting journalistic texts, instructors can provide their students with information from the perspectives of a society's contributions

to civilization, as well as that of everyday life. Because newspapers and magazines offer "snapshots" of various segments of the target culture, they are a logical medium for cross-cultural analysis. Several second language researchers have investigated the effects of newspapers on cross-cultural understanding (see, for example, Blatchford, 1986; Mollica, 1979) and found them to be effective sources of input. In the related literature on schema theory, however, there is abundant evidence that, when learners lack prerequisite cultural background information, input cannot be linked with existing cognitive structure, and comprehension cannot take place (Steffens, Joag-Dev and Anderson, 1979; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirley and Anderson, 1982; Johnson, 1984). Nevertheless, with appropriate preliminary activities, such as schema activators, advance organizers, and pre-reading exercises (see, Omaggio, 1986, for examples) print media not only provide learners with cultural information, but also offer them opportunities to strengthen their analytical skills (Seelye, 1985).

Focus on Writing

Authentic reading materials also lend themselves to the improvement of second language writing skills. It has often been stated that to get students to write, they must have something to write about. Culturally authentic readings fulfil that very goal by providing coverage of contemporary topics of high interest, with a natural embedding of vocabulary necessary to discuss or write about the subject. In addition, if the goal is to teach real-life use of language, it is impossible to separate reading comprehension from other skills, including writing. In realistic situations, reading an article, advertisement, or editorial may lead naturally to some type of authentic writing activity, such as writing a letter, summarizing, notetaking, or simply writing a note to oneself about a future endeavor.

Finally, numerous studies in first language research have pointed to a positive link between quality of writing and the quantity of reading one does for interest or pleasure (see Krashen, 1984, for a review of the research). Krashen hypothesizes that large amounts of reading give the writer a feeling for the look and texture of good writing, whether it is in the first or second language. Thus, the use of authentic readings in second language instruction may also play a role in the improvement of overall writing performance.

Focus on Speaking

Similar to writing, linking reading comprehension to speaking is a natural extension of utilizing print media. In real life we often react verbally to something we have read. Second language instruction mirrors real life when students are encouraged to react orally to authentic readings in the form of expressions of emotion or appreciation, discussions, or debates.

From a communicative perspective of language teaching, the reading of authentic texts may serve to generate two types of Littlewood's (1981) functional communicative activities. In the first type of activity one learner summarizes the contents of a text recently read while his/her partner asks pertinent questions. Here, information is shared, not unlike when a husband and wife discuss an article that only one has read. In the second type of activity in which both participants have read the text, processing of information is the goal. Communication results from the need to discuss and evaluate the facts, to argue, justify, or persuade in order to solve a problem or reach a common decision. In short, it is the print media that provides the stimulus for sharing and processing information, both valued goals of foreign language instruction.

Focus on Listening

Although print journalism differs radically from radio and television journalism (see Weissenreider, 1987, for a study of Spanish news broadcasts), written texts can be used as a basis for listening practice. Like speaking and writing skills, listening activities based on print media require a three-step process: reading, comprehension, and application. Reading aloud a newspaper or magazine article, as a text for listening comprehension activities, does not achieve the intended purpose, because the principle of authentic language use is violated. In real life, for example, listening skills are focused on newspapers and magazines during conversation, when seeking additional information about something one has read, and when comparing a newspaper article with a radio or television news story. Because print media are not forms of oral discourse, students should first read the text and then focus on authentic response formats that incorporate listening skills. Lynch (1982, p. 13) cautions that the normal objective of listening is not to score points nor to answer comprehension questions, but rather to "perceive, process, and

act on information in its broadest sense and for a wide variety of motives." Response formats should allow learners to exercise their own preferences and concentrate on details that are of personal interest to them. As such, authentic listening activities will often require oral or written responses. Whether those responses should be in the native or target language must be determined by the proficiency of the learners and the logical, intrinsic demands of the activity itself.

Guidelines for Preparation of Materials

When using print media in the classroom, care must be taken in the presentation. In order to be effective and appreciated by the learner, the choice of text, its visual appearance, and the construction of activities must all be carefully planned.

Certainly, a text must be chosen for its intrinsic value in order to encourage student interaction. Texts which relate to students' background knowledge are likely to be comprehended with less effort following a schema-theoretic view of reading. The difficulty level of a text is another consideration, particularly when teaching with a specific proficiency level in mind. Even within a text uniformity of level may not be present. In such cases, Child (1986, p. 105) suggests selecting certain portions of text, editing some sections, or rejecting the text as unsuitable.

The visual appearance of a text should be an overriding concern when preparing the materials. Poor print quality only adds to the learners' task and causes unnecessary frustration and anxiety. A clear copy of the text is essential. A slide or transparency can also be made if one wishes to focus attention on a central point.

To make the reading more accessible to students' comprehension, glossing may be helpful, if kept to a minimum. To maintain authenticity, Grellet (1981) suggests that the text be presented as it first appeared, with the same typeface, space devoted to the headlines, and accompanying picture. A message is conveyed to the reader through its original physical appearance, and information may be lost with alteration.

Once a text is carefully chosen with attention paid to its appearance, activities must be constructed to maximize student comprehension and interaction. Although the literature abounds with suggestions for different types of strategies (for an excellent review, see Philipps, 1984) generally three types of exercises are utilized. Pre-reading activities enable the reader to form ex-

pectations for the content they are to read. They teach students specific strategies needed to decode text, such as guessing from context, skimming, scanning, and working with word families. Mid-reading activities in the form of adjunct questions embedded in the text or located adjacent to it can be used to maintain students' involvement with the narrative (Melendez & Pritchard, 1985). Post-reading activities comprise more than traditional content questions. Depending on the target skill for which the reading was initiated, a wide range of exercises test comprehension directly (to avoid students quoting from the passage); lead students to draw conclusions, express opinions, or make cross-cultural comparisons; or help students gain an overall understanding.

Caveats

The literature on authentic materials has also provided a number of caveats for second language educators. Well-known newspapers and magazines such as *Paris Match* and *El País* offer a perspective largely focused on life in the capital cities. In order to provide learners with a more realistic view of the target culture, Mariet (1985) suggests exposing them to a variety of regional texts. In addition, one must be aware that newspapers and magazines are commercial enterprises aimed at a particular target readership; and, as such they may reflect the values, interests, and biases of the readership, as well as those of the owners, editorial staff, and the political mileu.

Discourse register is another significant element to consider when adopting or adapting authentic materials for the classroom. Optimally, a variety of registers from informal to formal should be presented in their appropriate contexts to learners. Choosing texts from various sections of the newspaper should guarantee a representative sampling of registers.

It is obvious that preliminary study of the texts must be done before they are assigned to students. Internal organization of articles and arrangement of various sections, for example, may not be similar to U.S. newspapers with which learners are familiar. In those cases a pre-reading familiarization session must be planned before attempting to do any skill development activities.

Finally, newspapers and magazines should not be used indiscriminately. Without concern for how the language is being used and the context in which the language was produced, the cultural reality. Learners should be taught to determine which bits of language are useful in everyday life and which are specific to the article (Sewell, 1982).

Conclusion

This paper supports the notion that authentic materials can be used to promote second language acquisition. A clear need exists for future research into the effects of such materials upon achievement in the five skills. However, because print media provide opportunities for real interaction with the target language and culture, the authors believe that authentic texts are a valuable instructional resource for the second language classroom of today.

Bibliography

Beatie, Bruce A., Laura Martin, and Bethany S. Oberst. "Reading in the First-Year College Textbook: A Syllabus for Textbook Authors, Publishers, Reviewers, and Instructors." *Modern Language Journal* 68 (1984): 203–211.

Bernhardt, Elizabeth B. "Toward an Information-Processing Perspective in Foreign Language Reading." *Modern Language Journal* 68 (1984): 322–331.

Blatchford, Charles H. "Newspapers: Vehicles for Teaching ESOL With a Cultural Focus." In *Culture Bound*. ed. Joyce Merrill Valdés. Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 130–136.

Child, James R. "Language Proficiency Levels and the Typology of Texts." *Defining and Developing Proficiency*. Eds. Heidi Byrnes & Michael Canale. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1987: 97–106.

Davies, Alan. "Simple, Simplified and Simplification: What is Authentic?" In *Reading in a Foreign Language*. Eds. Charles Alderson and A.H. Urquhart. New York: Longman, 1984, pp. 181–198.

Duquette, Georges, Stephen Dunnet and Anthony Papalia. "The Effect of Authentic Materials in Acquiring a Second Language." *Canadian Modern Language Review* 43 (1987): 479–492.

Grellet, Françoise. *Developing Reading Skills: A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Johnson, Patricia. "Effects on Reading Comprehension of Language Complexity and Cultural Background of Text." *TESOL Quarterly* 15 (1981): 169–181.

Klare, George R., cited in Alan Davies. "Simple, Simplified and Simplification: What is Authentic?" *In Reading in a Foreign Language*, eds.

Charles Alderson and A.H. Urquhart. New York: Longman, 1984, pp. 190–191.

Krashen, Stephen. *Writing: Research, Theory and Applications*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984.

_____ and Tracy Terrell. *The Natural Approach; Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. London: Pergamon Press, 1983.

Levine, Martin G. and George J. Haus. "The Effect of Background Knowledge On the Reading Comprehension of Second Language Learners." *Foreign Language Annals* 18 (1985): 391–397.

Littlewood, William. *Communicative Language Teaching: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Lynch, Anthony J. "Authenticity in Language Teaching: Some Implications for the Design of Listening Materials." *British Journal of Language Teaching* 20 (1982): 9–16.

Mariet, François. "La Presse Française telle que la connaissent et l'ignorent les étudiants en français aux Etate-Unis." *French Review* 59 (1985): 219–233.

Melendez, E. Jane and Robert H. Pritchard. "Applying Schema Theory to Foreign Language Reading." *Foreign Language Annals* 18 (1985): 399–403.

Mollica, Anthony. "A Tiger in Your Tank: Advertisements in the Language Classroom." *Canadian Modern Language Review* 35 (1979): 691–743.

Omaggio, Alice C. *Teaching Language in Context*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1986.

Phillips, June K. "Practical Implications of Recent Research in Reading." *Foreign Language Annals* 17 (1984): 285–296.

Reynolds, Ralph, Marsha A. Taylor, Margaret S. Steffensen, Larry I. Shirey and Richard C. Anderson. "Cultural Schemata and Reading Comprehension." *Reading Research Quarterly* 17 (1982): 353–366.

Rings, Lana. "Authentic Language and Authentic Conversational Texts." *Foreign Language Annals* 19 (1986): 203–208.

Seelye, Ned. *Teaching Culture*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company, 1985.

Sewell, P. "What French do French-Language Newspapers Teach?" *British Journal of Language Teaching* 20 (1982): 135–137.

Steffensen, Margaret S., Chitra Joag-Dev and Richard C. Anderson. "A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Reading Comprehension." *Reading Research Quarterly* 15 (1979): 10–29.

Swaffer, Janet K. "Reading Authentic Texts in a Foreign Language: A Cognitive Model." *Modern Language Journal* 69 (1985): 15–34.

Tetrault, Emery W. "In Support of a Natural Order in Second Language Reading." *Foreign Language Annals* 17 (1984): 313–315.

Weissenreider, Maureen. "Listening to the News in Spanish." *Modern Language Journal* 71 (1987): 18–27.

Widdowson, Henry G. *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.